



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## The American Institute of Sacred Literature

### A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE ON JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

*For the benefit of ministers and teachers of the Bible who are interested in present-day movements in biblical study, a professional reading course on "Jesus in the Light of Modern Scholarship" is being outlined in these pages by SHIRLEY JACKSON CASE, of the New Testament Department in the University of Chicago. Our sources of information regarding Jesus were dealt with in the October number; his life and teaching as determined by modern critical study were discussed in November. Questions for consideration should be addressed to the Editors of the BIBLICAL WORLD; inquiries as to books and traveling libraries, to the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE.*

---

#### III. THE EARLY CHRISTIANS' INTERPRETATION OF JESUS

The following books upon this topic have been chosen for careful reading: J. Weiss, *Paul and Jesus*; J. Weiss, *Christ, the Beginnings of Dogma*; P. Lobstein, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*; K. Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

Paul is the earliest of Jesus' interpreters whose opinions we know at first hand. But even a casual reading of the Pauline epistles shows us that the Apostle has very little to say about Jesus and his work upon earth. His death seems to have been the only phase of his earthly career that impressed Paul as supremely significant for Christian faith. But the risen Jesus, exalted to a place of heavenly lordship, and later to come as the Messiah in judgment, figures very largely in Paul's thinking. This fact is so striking that sometimes critics have claimed that Paul had no vital concern with the earthly Jesus, and with his preaching about the fatherhood of God and the attainment of divine sonship for man through the realization of a godlike life. In Jesus' conception of religion emphasis fell upon ethical and spiritual items; in Paul's conception more doctrinaire features seem to predominate, salvation being conditioned upon assent to a certain type of christological speculation.

Six years ago the late Professor Wrede of Breslau, in a small treatise on *Paul*, sharply restated this difference between the thought of Paul and that of Jesus, and went on to affirm that historical Christianity had adopted more generally Paul's way of thinking, so that he and not Jesus

was in reality the founder of the new religion. Wrede's book called forth several protests, of which Weiss's *Paul and Jesus* is one of the latest.

Weiss admits a wide difference between the teaching of Jesus and the preaching of Paul, yet he contends that the latter was influenced in important respects by the former. It was not so much Jesus' teaching as his personality that exerted this influence. But how did this come about? Weiss would have it that Paul had known the earthly Jesus personally, and so was able to identify him in the heavenly vision on the way to Damascus. To be sure, in II Cor. 5:16, Paul writes, "even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more," but whether this is meant literally, or is more general and mystical in significance, may still be questioned. But Paul, in persecuting the Christians, had had ample opportunity to observe the type of life which believers were endeavoring to exhibit in imitation of their Master. This will undoubtedly have impressed the persecutor forcibly, and it may well have been an important antecedent to his conversion. Paul and Jesus, then, are more vitally related than one might think, judging merely by a comparison of the more formal side of their respective teachings. They were one not in doctrine so much as in vital piety. On the other hand, the different circumstances under which they lived necessitated some wide variations in their respective ways of thinking, the fundamental difference between the two in this respect being that Jesus did not present himself as the object of religious reverence, while for Paul veneration of Jesus is a primary dogma of religion. And this was true of believers in general in Paul's day. But at the basis of all dogma was the new piety, which even in Paul's case must be traced back to Jesus himself, who is thus the genuine founder of Christianity.

The question of the place given Jesus in the interpretation of believers generally, is treated more comprehensively in Weiss's *Christ, the Beginnings of Dogma*. The earliest phase of belief was "Jesus is the Messiah" who will soon come to set up his kingdom—a faith which rested upon the disciples' conviction of having seen the risen Jesus. Further substantiation of this faith was found in recalling Jesus' own messianic claims, and the Old Testament notions about the Son of God and the Son of Man. Paul adopted the doctrine of the heavenly Christ and elaborated it along lines peculiar to his own thinking, while other interpreters followed with their individual contributions to the evolution of christological speculation. These items are presented so clearly by Weiss that further comment here is unnecessary.

The significant reflection which this survey occasions is the wide departure of christological speculation from the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the primitive gospel tradition. There he did not present himself as the supreme object of religious devotion, but told men of the Father whom they were to worship and serve. But immediately upon attainment of the resurrection faith the disciples began to give Jesus a larger and larger place in their reflection, so that ultimately the religion which Jesus had exemplified and taught was overlaid by a faith which had the exalted Christ as its center.

The doctrine of Jesus' virgin birth and belief in his resurrection stand out so prominently in early Christian thinking that they merit separate treatment, for which the works of Lobstein and Lake may furnish a basis.

Lobstein compresses into the minimum of space a strong argument against the historicity and doctrinal importance of the infancy stories of Matthew and Luke. His book is practically a brief to indicate the superior value of a faith detached from such a source although it may express itself through such a medium. He also seeks to show the religious value which found expression in the virgin-birth tradition. The suggestions which follow correspond to the progress of Lobstein's argument from page to page so that the reader will have no difficulty in relating them to the proper parts of the book.

In the editorial introduction Dr. Morrison indicates that the spread of the scientific mode of thought makes the infancy narratives an increasing tax upon faith which is thus forced to ask whether these stories are sober history or theology in historical dress.

Lobstein's preface is given to the criticism of an unimportant book. His real argument begins on p. 41, where he indicates that in the earliest form of the gospel story the baptism of Jesus by John was the starting-point for his career. Thus the infancy narratives had no place in this early gospel, and moreover, from the point of view of literary criticism, they do not form an integral part of Matthew and Luke. They obviously contradict each other and raise insuperable difficulties. For example, the two genealogies which are almost totally different startle the reader by agreement in the singular fact that they both give the lineage of Joseph—certainly a strange way of approach to the virgin birth of Jesus. Further, the author calls attention to the parents' wonder in the temple incident, and the strangeness of the mother's fear (Mark 3:20, 21), in the light of the annunciation knowledge which Mary must have had. He also points out with telling effect the silence

of Paul and John. The doctrine is then taken up as a reflection of Christian faith in terms of contemporaneous Messianism, and upon the background of the Old Testament records of remarkable births corresponding to remarkable careers. It is held that the evangelists do not base the sinlessness of Jesus upon the manner of his physical birth. Such a device is considered only a half-way remedy at best. And then consider how far back the "purifying" process must go in order to be perfectly valid.

The reader should make clear to himself the difference of the point of view in Paul and John from that of the authors of the infancy narratives. Paul and John speak of the incarnation of a pre-existent being, while the narrators of the infancy narratives speak of the creation and birth of a new being. The early Christian theologians show no end of ingenuity in adapting these to each other for dogmatic use.

Lobstein himself, however, runs into a strange mysticism (pp. 96-102, 112) in making his confession of faith. For in asserting the divinity of Jesus he makes him so extraneous in origin as to discredit hopelessly the moral possibilities of this world, and to ignore the fact of divine immanence. This is almost as evident in his conclusion as in his confession of faith.

Lake limits his examination, so far as this is possible, to those parts of the New Testament, and certain other early Christian writings, which give direct testimony to the resurrection and appearance of Jesus. He does not discuss passages which incidentally affirm or imply that Jesus arose from the dead, and he attempts to escape the influence of dogmatic considerations, or inferences drawn from the experience of Christians, or the life of the Christian church. Indeed he holds that while the facts of experience may well prove the continued, unbroken life of the Lord, they can have no bearing upon the historical question whether the body of Jesus left the tomb and revealed itself to the senses of certain persons.

The method and order in which such an inquiry must be prosecuted are clearly outlined and closely followed. First, the paragraphs which present the evidence, in those documents which have come down to us, are carefully examined, their original text recovered, so far as this is possible, and their contents interpreted. In I Cor., chap. 15, we have the earliest and most original tradition. Paul here reports testimony which must have come to him very directly from those who believed the Lord had appeared to them, and he adds to this testimony, derived from others, a brief but clear statement that Jesus had also appeared to him. The Gospels, however, do not contain such direct testimony as this.

Mark, the earliest of them, was not written by an eyewitness. Moreover it has come down to us in a mutilated form, which contains no account of the resurrection or of the appearance of Jesus. Mark doubtless contained, as it left the hands of the author, a report of an appearance of Jesus to Peter in Galilee, and perhaps of appearances to others. But this last conclusion cannot be restored from fragments in the other gospels. The other gospels contain accounts which come from unknown sources, and these cannot be identified or restored to their original forms, and they contain inconsistencies and improbabilities which must be recognized. The verses added to Mark and the fragments of the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel of Peter add little or nothing to our historical sources.

Secondly, the author attempts to reconstruct from these sources the content of the earliest tradition. Following is the result: Joseph of Arimathaea buried the body of Jesus on Friday evening. On Sunday morning some women visited an empty tomb in the vicinity, mistaking it for the one in which Jesus' body had been placed. The disciples had returned to their homes but their courage was gradually revived by appearances of the risen Lord, first to Peter in Galilee and afterward to others both in Galilee and in Judea. Thus they were led to return to Jerusalem to take up the Master's work. Here they met the women who told them of the empty grave, so there was added the statement that the resurrection took place on the third day.

In the third division of the book the author endeavors to discover the facts behind this earliest tradition. Was the tomb empty? Was the resurrection on the third day? What significance is to be attached to the appearances? These questions are answered briefly. The grave was not empty. It was assumed to be so by the disciples the moment they experienced a vision of the risen Lord, and this inference was confirmed by the testimony of the women who supposed that they had visited the grave in which Jesus' body had been placed. Mention of the "third day" rests upon inference from the experience of the women, but in the later apologetic it was supplemented by Old Testament prophecy and by predictions of Jesus. The third question does not admit of so definite an answer. The author believes the earliest tradition regarded the appearances as spiritual, the emphasis upon the material side in Luke and John being due to apologetic interests. But to explain the nature of a spiritual manifestation is difficult. The theory of subjective hallucination is rejected, and it is maintained that the disciples actually witnessed certain appearances dependent upon the spirit personality of the

heavenly Jesus. How these are to be explained we are as yet unable to say, but it is suggested that evidence collected by the society of psychical research may ultimately shed new light upon this elusive subject.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Did the first believers in Jesus' messiahship think they were advocating a new religion or only a corrected form of their former faith?
2. In what sense was primitive Christianity a new religion, as compared with contemporary Jewish faith?
3. How much of Paul's theology is brought over from his previous Jewish thought?
4. What were the chief agencies bringing about belief in Jesus' resurrection and heavenly exaltation?
5. What relation had Jesus' earthly career to these items of belief?
6. When did interest first arise in finding evidence of Jesus' messiahship in his activity upon earth?
7. What particular need was met by the doctrine of the virgin birth?
8. How did the spread of Christianity from Jewish to Greek soil affect theological speculations?
9. How does Jesus' personal religion stand related to the early disciples' religion about him?

#### ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. C. McGiffert, *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*.  
 G. B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*.  
 E. F. Scott, *The Apologetic of the New Testament*.  
 J. C. Granbery, *An Outline of New Testament Christology*.  
 E. D. Burton, J. M. P. Smith, G. B. Smith, *Biblical Ideas of Atonement*.  
 W. Wrede, *Paul*.  
 A. Meyer, *Jesus or Paul*.  
 H. Weinel, *St. Paul, the Man and his Work*.  
 W. Soltan, *The Birth of Jesus Christ*.  
 P. W. Schmiedel, "Resurrection and Ascension Narratives" in *Encyclopedia Biblica*, Vol. IV.  
 J. Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*.  
 J. Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*.

McGiffert treats comprehensively the historical situation which called forth and cherished early Christian thinking, while Stevens expounds that thinking as embodied in the several New Testament books. Scott briefly surveys the main features of the Christian apologetic, pp. 37-71, dealing specifically with the early defense of Jesus' messiahship. Granbery presents with admirable clearness the content of New Testament christological speculation, indicating also the genetic relations of its various types. Burton-Smith-Smith treat the

general history of the biblical conception of atonement, but pp. 145-243 give the early Christian representation of Jesus' relation to this theme. Wrede emphasizes Paul's independence of Jesus, while Meyer finds a vital connection between the two, notwithstanding Paul's originality as a thinker. Weinel takes a wider survey, recognizing the importance of Paul's personality and activity as factors in his contribution to Christianity. Soltau protests against taking the infancy narratives as actual history, and Schmiedel, by a very rigid application of criticism, rejects the historicity of the resurrection stories. Orr, on the other hand, contends vigorously for the literal accuracy of the gospel representation of both these items.



*Fra Angelico*

MADONNA DELLA STELLA